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Strict secrecy could bring more CIA-brand trouble

THE NEW UNITED States Senate will come about as close to being equally divided along party lines as it possibly could—52-48 Republican. Though the numbers seem to be very close—and indeed, in many areas there is likely to be much healthy partisan squabbling—there is one matter on which the senators and legislative staffers of both parties seem to be in general agreement: They believe the new Senate is likely to drop regulations that currently restrict the activities and secrecy of the Central Intelligence Agency.

How soon we forget. Endless problems have been caused by giving the CIA the freedom to undertake its programs abroad without supervision or accountability. Little has been gained. Secrecy among the ranks of the intelligence community has only prevented more moderate and sensible public officials from assessing the value of our clandestine schemes.

The problem does not stem from the Agency's intelligence operations, strictly speaking. The United States does have operatives in both friendly and hostile countries around the world, and they in turn have snoopers sprinkled

around the States. That in itself has not caused much of a problem, although Iran has provided one obvious exception.

But the other side of the Agency's work is its tampering with the sovereignty of foreign governments, a type of endeavor at which it is unfortunately very experienced. The fiasco at the Bay of Pigs was only the best-known of CIA attempts to remove a popular government from power. Had the cover of secrecy been "blown" on it, one of the more embarrassing and detrimental chapters of American history might never have made the textbooks.

One provision of the bills likely to be shuffled around Congress next year is particularly frightening. Under the bill, private citizens who come by information about covert intelligence agents—even information culled from nonclassified material—would be subject to prosecution if they made any revelations.

If that notion is any indication of the general tenor of respect which will be given First Amendment liberties under the new president and Congress, ours will be a sorry lot indeed.